

Connecticut College Digital Commons @ Connecticut College

English Faculty Publications

English Department

1-1-1981

Catching a Ray

Charles Hartman

Connecticut College, cohar@conncoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/engfacpub>



Part of the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hartman, Charles O. "Catching A Ray." *Ploughshares* 4 (1981): 182-4. Web.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English Department at Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. For more information, please contact bpancier@conncoll.edu.

The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.



Emerson College

Catching a Ray

Author(s): Charles O. Hartman

Source: *Ploughshares*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1981), pp. 182-184

Published by: [Ploughshares](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40348613>

Accessed: 26/03/2013 10:33

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Ploughshares and Emerson College are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Ploughshares*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Charles O. Hartman

Catching A Ray

I

Where the gray beast of the water
 cornered itself into harbor,
 that mouth amid whiteness
 gasped on the raw deck
 a secret thrust from beneath
 the brittle hide of the sea

— This

surfaces again as I lurch
 awake speechless and wet
 in the gray dawn, caught
 in the webbed sheets:

the ordinary

lead scales of the flounder
 spilled out of the net
 around my landsman's shoes;
 that lividness spilled out
 shocking among them; and how
 nothing speaks but the air
 is full of petitions, laments
 a routine catastrophe, grinding
 of gears gone wrong
 down in the waves' heavy
 housing. It wasn't this
 I came out here to see.

II

Suddenly no one wants to be
 where he is. We are all
 (the fisherman and I, the ray,
 these dumb flustered flounder)
 embarrassed, some of us ready
 to die of embarrassment;
 none of us prepared for the moment
 to say what might have been
 said to correct a day gone bad,
 writhing on the dark boards.
 We who can breathe breathe
 in the shallows of the sky,
 gaping. This one on the deck —
 eyeless, like a half-
 remembered face, refusing
 to finish itself

(whose flight
 has been a kind of glimmering
 supple vocabulary, the right
 phrase even now caught on the tip
 of a wing that flexes in a last
 eloquence, the mouth trying
 in silence as a throat tries
 to croak waking words
 to tell what has been
 dreamed)

— in the end
 leaves in the undiluted air
 a leather corpse and, when I turn
 my eyes away, an image
 seared against the sky.

III

Are these things meant to come
lurching out of the nowhere
that is the sea, to break
the surface tension guarding
world from world, to bring
everything right out on deck
where the gunnels, that saved us
from the sea, have locked us in
to look at it, just as it is?
You say, Why should I carry
such a thing around?

Lying back, you know
the possible corrections:
to throw the witness back
into the sea, or yourself,
to sink back into sleep,
saying, It's early yet.

Somehow the white belly,
the black boards of the deck
and gunnels, the seaweed-green
slick boots of the fisherman,
and even the slowly silvering
scales of dying flounder
catching an unpromised fire
between the gray dawns
of sky and the closed sea:
these colors fasten me
where I am; and the deck that bears
everything it can bear
rides a little closer to the waves.